When Did Jesus Enter Jerusalem?

A Day of Triumph

When Did Jesus Enter Jerusalem?
Audio MP3

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From John's account of Jesus' last week, there have arisen two thoughts on when he rode into Jerusalem to the accolades of the people and with palm branches of victory strewn along the road: Sunday, Nisan 9 and Monday, Nisan 10.

On Nisan 10, Israel was to select a lamb for Passover. On Nisan 14, the Passover lambs and Jesus were slain (Exodus 12:3, 6-10). In AD 33, Nisan 10 would have been Monday and the Passover lambs were eaten by the Jews on Friday evening (April 3, Julian calendar).

"Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was ... On the morrow the great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried out, Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel" (John 12:1, 12-13).

Thus, Jesus' triumphal entry was six days before the Passover. Whether "Passover" in John 12:1 means slaying the lamb (Ezra 6:19-20) on Nisan 14 or the Feast of Passover (Ezekiel 45:21) on Nisan 15 must be determined from the context, if possible.

In the first case, Jesus entered Bethany on Saturday, Nisan 8, and Jerusalem on Sunday, Nisan 9. Supporters of this view appeal to Leviticus 23:5, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month between the two evenings, is Jehovah's Passover." Moreover, John 13:1 refers to the "feast of the passover," showing that "passover" in John 12:1 does not necessarily refer to the feast day. They also appeal to Matthew 26:17-18, Mark 14:12, Luke 22: 7-8 and Exodus 12:18.

Jesus journeyed to Lazarus' house in time for supper, implying a day's journey. Was this on Saturday, violating the Sabbath?

Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder allowed up to 2000 cubits (nearly 1 km) as a "Sabbath's day journey" (consistent with Acts 1:12). Bethany was two or three times that distance from Jerusalem and was 2 km from the nearest village to the east, En Shemesh. If Jesus made the journey to Bethany on Saturday from any nearby village, he would have violated a "Sabbath-day's journey." However, John 12:1 does not tell us where or when Jesus started the journey. It only says that he arrived in Bethany (Greek, *erchomai*) six days before passover.

If Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, Nisan 9, then he cleansed the Temple on Monday, Nisan 10 and debated with Jewish leaders and gave final lessons to his disciples on Tuesday, Nisan 11. This seems at variance with both Matthew 26:2 and Mark 14:1 which indicate that when these lessons were completed, "after two days was the feast of the Passover and the unleavened bread" (Saturday) (Mark 14:1).

If "passover" in John 12:1 refers to the feast of Passover on Nisan 15, then Jesus reached Bethany on Sunday, Nisan 9 and entered Jerusalem on Monday, Nisan 10.

Supporters of this view appeal to Exodus 12:3, that says the Passover lamb was selected on Nisan 10 — corresponding to the day Jesus entered Jerusalem presenting himself as Israel's king. They also appeal to John 18:28, 19:14, and Numbers 28:16-17 (distinguishing Jehovah's Passover from Israel's Passover).

If Jesus and his disciples came to Bethany on Sunday afternoon (Nisan 9), they probably started from Jericho, about 25 km away, a full day's journey. Thus Jesus would have entered Jerusalem on Monday, Nisan 10, consistent with Exodus 12:3. He would have cleansed the temple on Tuesday. On Wednesday, Jesus would have debated the Jewish leaders and completed his final lessons to his disciples two days before "the feast of the Passover and the unleavened bread" (Mark 14:1).

However we view this question, it is unlikely to affect what we **do** today.

(1) Citations from RVIC Bible.

(2) Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, Princeton University Press (1959), page 577.

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